

NOS Special Projects

Special Projects is a staff office reporting directly to the Assistant Administrator of NOAA's National Ocean Service (NOS). It was created in 1997 as part of an effort to strengthen NOS's focus on a mission of coastal stewardship. It consists of approximately 35 professionals who come from the former Strategic Environmental Assessments Division and have a wide range of backgrounds and experience: marine science, environmental engineering, estuarine ecology, geography, computer mapping, resource economics, multimedia and communication arts, and integrated planning and assessment.

Mission

The mission of NOS Special Projects is to provide expertise, products and services that help the National Ocean Service (NOS) to design and implement an effective program of coastal stewardship throughout the agency. This effort includes exploring ways to leverage the agency's considerable expertise into a force that more directly supports and influences the sound management and protection of coastal areas. Special Projects will also be in a unique position to bridge the gap between NOS scientific efforts and coastal management policy issues. **The goal of Special Projects is to increase the effectiveness of coastal management in the United States and thereby ensure continued economic prosperity and environmental well-being throughout the nation's coastal regions.**

To achieve this mission, Special Projects will:

- (1) Facilitate the development of integrated strategies that promote cooperation throughout the agency;
- (2) Conduct unique regional and national assessments critical to the NOS mission and coastal stewardship;
- (3) Identify and apply innovative techniques and technologies to enhance NOS national assessment and communication capabilities, providing NOS with a suite of "national" level information products and services to offer its partners; and
- (4) Reach out to a wide new group of partners and clients to help amplify the impact of agency priorities and the goals of coastal stewardship.

It is particularly important to ensure NOS's capacity to quickly and effec-

tively engage in significant emerging issues.

Products and Services

Special Projects will work closely with its partners both inside and outside of NOAA to generate a variety of targeted products and services.

- **National and regional coastal geographic assessment frameworks** will provide a wide range of coastal

A "New" National Ocean Service

In 1997, the National Ocean Service embarked on a substantial new effort to focus on coastal stewardship. A key component of this multiyear effort is the creation of a new agency structure. Two new program offices have been established:

- National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, and
- Response and Restoration

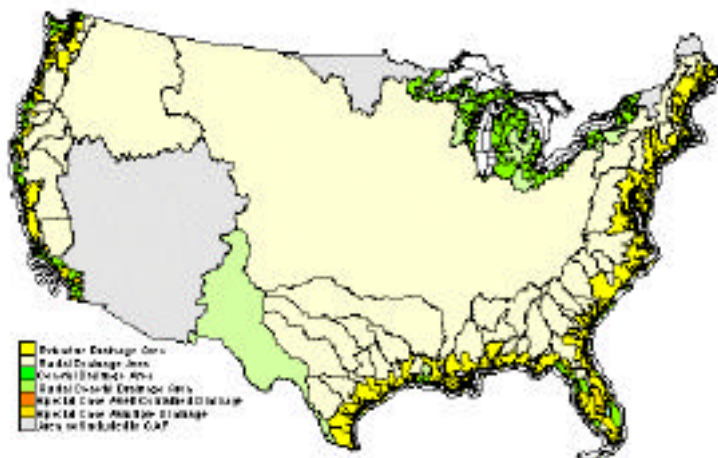
as well as two new staff offices:

- International Programs, and
- Special Projects.

These offices include personnel from the former Office of Ocean Resources Conservation and Assessment and from NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service and Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research. A Senior Management Council, composed of office directors, will advise the Assistant Administrator on strategic directions and priorities.

Additional changes under way include:

- improving program planning and implementation;
- improving external communication and support;
- establishing a regional focus for products and services; and
- broadening agency perspectives on customers and partners.



NOAA's Coastal Assessment and Data Synthesis Framework includes the hydrologic boundaries of over 400 coastal watersheds in the contiguous United States (138 estuaries). More than 250 copies of this framework have been distributed to interested users.

Special Projects Organization

Special Projects staff members are organized in three teams (or branches), each with many years' experience developing and delivering relevant products and services.

NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Focuses on internet, multimedia, and other innovative and experimental approaches that improve the accessibility and communication of the agency's products and services. This team supports NOAA's State of the Coast Report and the NOS MapFinder Service.

INTEGRATED PLANNING TEAM

Conducts a wide array of consensus-based process design and planning. Provides continuing support to NOS planning and program management priorities, and is involved in ongoing coastal management efforts with the agency's sanctuaries, reserves and coastal zone programs.

NATIONAL COASTAL ASSESSMENTS TEAM

Provides targeted coastal resource analysis and data synthesis services (e.g., the National Estuarine Eutrophication Survey and the National Coastal Assessment and Data Synthesis Framework). Expertise also includes resource economics and coastal pollution.

stewards with co-registered geographic data, in digital and map-based formats, for organizing and comparing thematic data and information by watersheds, state and county boundaries, census tracts, ecosystem and/or other coastal units. More than 250 copies of these geographic files are now in use. The watershed boundaries and overall framework are rapidly becoming the "standard" for federal and state agencies that need to organize information on a variety of coastal issues. For example, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Water uses this framework to organize coastal areas in its National Index of Watershed Indicators project. The state of Florida uses the framework to organize marine resource and habitat information and program activities for the entire state.

- **Thematic national and regional data sets** will provide coastal stewards and NOS/NOAA programs with a large number of established data sets that are continually updated in conjunction with the geographic framework described above. These data are being made available through specialized CD-ROMs (e.g., 1995 National Shellfish Register, 1997 Gulf of Mexico Shellfish Challenge, Benthic Habitats of the Florida Keys) and via the internet.

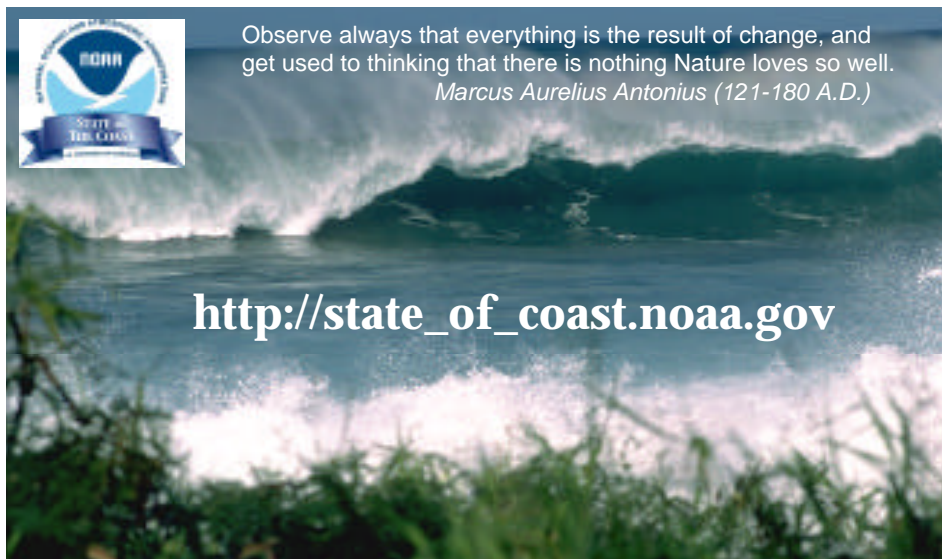
Special Projects will also offer data synthesis services to compile complex

and disparate data from many sources. This will allow coastal stewards, NOS and NOAA, and other users to incorporate their own data on many topics (e.g., coastal pollution, shellfish growing waters, the economic value of coastal resources, land cover, population, and physical and hydrologic characteristics of estuaries).

- **National and regional assessments** will offer a unique set of data and mapping services to coastal stewards, and will facilitate comprehensive assessments on a wide variety of coastal topics and problems. For example, Special Projects staff are working with NOAA, EPA and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to identify optimum locations for coastal water-quality monitoring based upon specific physical and hydrologic characteristics of coastal watersheds. They are also helping key estuarine and coastal scientists to assess the results and policy implications of the National Eutrophication Survey. The geographic framework, data sets and integrated database system described above are essential elements in both of these efforts.

This assessment capability enables NOS to provide valuable data to federal, regional and local decision-makers. Furthermore, it gives NOS the requisite technical leverage to amplify the impact of national coastal management priorities.

- **Interdisciplinary environmental/natural resource planning and management** will help coastal stewards and NOS/NOAA programs to implement national and regional activities that require the systematic mobilization of large constituencies of regional and local interest or that tap into existing expert knowledge bases. Such a systematic process is essential to define, describe, prioritize and resolve complex coastal research, management and planning issues. Consensus-based planning and facilitating are key features. Recent examples include designing and implementing a process to establish a Special Area Management Plan at Pea Patch Island, Delaware; developing a strategy for the National Fisheries Institute to solve



The Special Projects Office developed the internet-based State of the Coast Report as a new means of communicating with the coastal community.

fishery management problems associated with biotoxins and pathogens; and working with more than a dozen federal, state and local organizations to establish a regional environmental monitoring strategy in South Florida.

With this capability, NOS brings a unique problem-solving framework to the multidisciplinary, multijurisdictional arena of coastal management.

- **Economic valuations of coastal resources use** will help NOS/NOAA and other coastal stewards develop effective valuation methods and approaches, survey designs and information products (e.g., an internet site that accesses nationwide data on coastal resource uses and users). NOS will foster and participate in partnerships that conduct resource valuation surveys and assessments, thereby providing consultation and technical support for socioeconomic problem-solving. Recent examples of such partnerships include: (1) the survey and subsequent study, "Linking the Economy and Environment of Florida Bay/Florida Keys"; (2) a similar partnership effort in Southern California; and (3) technical support of a conference, "Setting the Socioeconomic Research Agenda," under the auspices of the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida.

- **Advanced technology and communications** will ensure nationwide dissemination of information products for NOS/NOAA programs and other coastal stewards. The purpose is to ensure that NOS communicates effectively with its partners and promotes the widest possible distribution and use of its products, services and expertise. Special Projects will design and test emerging technologies (e.g., multimedia, video, internet) to achieve these objectives. Nationally significant efforts now under way include NOAA's State of the Coast Report and the NOS MapFinder Service.

- **Planning and project support for the Assistant Administrator** will involve developing tools and procedures for simple, consistent and effective planning and decision-making within

What is "coastal stewardship"?

At the National Ocean Service, coastal stewardship means supporting and encouraging the sustainable use of national and global coastal regions to maintain economic prosperity and environmental well-being. This responsibility requires NOS and NOAA to (1) integrate their capabilities with those of the extramural community, (2) provide technological and other expert assistance to partners, and (3) help others achieve success in their stewardship responsibilities.

NOS. Special Projects will facilitate agency planning activities, especially those now under way as part of redefining the agency. Special Projects will also conduct "cross-cutting" projects (i.e., those that strive to integrate NOS and NOAA programs and policies with those of other coastal stewards). Special Projects staff are currently engaged in several such efforts: (1) developing and implementing NOS/NOAA participation in the National Dialogue; (2) providing organization, design and production support for the National Ocean Conference; (3) helping the U.S. Department of Commerce develop materials on the Law of the Sea; and (4) providing design and management support for the National Fisheries Institute conferences.

- **National Ocean Service Rotational Internships** will provide opportunities for three- to six-month work assignments among NOS/NOAA programs and other coastal stewards. Rotations will enhance the agency's "short-term expertise" for priority projects, help NOS better communicate its mission of coastal stewardship, and enrich employees' professional experience. Assignments can be designed for personnel at all skill and grade levels.

Some Current Projects

NOAA's National Estuarine Eutrophication Survey: The goal is to systematically and accurately characterize related water-quality parameters. Over 400 coastal and estuarine scientists participated in a series of surveys, site visits and regional workshops from 1992 to 1997. A national data base and a series of regional reports describing 16 parameters for 138 estuaries are complete. A workshop to interpret results is scheduled for June 1998. A final assessment report will be published shortly thereafter. For more information, contact Suzanne Bricker, 301/713-3000, ext. 200.

NOAA's State of the Coast Report: This is a NOAA-wide activity designed to establish a new way for NOAA to report to, and listen to, the nation on the status of our coastal resources. The centerpiece of the internet-based report is a series of essays on major coastal issues and problems, such as *Coral Reefs*, *Spills of Oil and Chemical Materials*, *Coastal Population and Development*, and *Oxygen Depletion*. Experts from around the nation offer their interpretations. This report will evolve in the years ahead, as more essays and new offerings are added. The internet address is: http://state_of_coast.noaa.gov
For more information, contact Thomas LaPointe, 301/713-3000, ext. 168.

A Focus on Partnerships

Using the National Ocean Service's substantial scientific, technical and program administration knowledge as a point of departure, there is now an opportunity to reach out to a wide new group of partners and amplify the impact of NOS programs.

Earning the trust of new partners—and achieving more effective coastal management—means listening more and challenging old assumptions. It means focusing on common interests, on the things that unite the National Ocean Service, and turning outward. The success of this new mission of coastal stewardship may well depend on it. Helping to ensure this success will be a principal objective of the staff office for Special Projects.

NOAA's NOS MapFinder Service:

This internet offering is a single location that provides NOS customers and constituents with direct access to thousands of NOS products, including nautical charts, aerial photography, coastal survey maps, hydrographic surveys and modeled bathymetry, and environmental sensitivity index maps. An interactive mapping interface allows users to pinpoint their selection of appropriate products at regional, state and local scales. This NOS service is continually expanding as new products are offered and existing ones updated. The internet address is: <http://mapindex.nos.noaa.gov>
For more information, contact Peter Grose, 301/713-3000, ext. 132.

NOAA's National Coastal Assessment and Data Synthesis (CA&DS) Framework:

The goal of this analysis tool is to translate existing knowledge into more effective management and policy decisions. The cornerstone is a carefully designed spatial framework that defines the hydrologic boundaries of 138 coastal watersheds in the contiguous United States. The framework also includes more than a dozen national data sets, consistently derived for all 138 estuaries. Additional spatial coverages (e.g., coastal counties, states, Congressional districts) can also be applied. NOS Special Projects is collaborating with experts from NOAA, EPA, USGS and others to develop and improve CA&DS. For more information, contact Paul Orlando, 301/713-3000, ext. 176.

South Florida Social Science Action

Plan: The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force asked the Social Science Subgroup (in which Special Projects participates) to identify the need for social science involvement, planning and research in the South Florida restoration effort. Special Projects played a key role in conducting a social science symposium held in Key Largo, Florida, in February 1998. About 60 experts attended to identify social science priorities for this nationally significant coastal region. For more information, contact Tom Culliton, 301/713-3000, ext. 142.

National Fisheries Institute:

NOS Special Projects was asked to help the National Fisheries Institute (NFI) plan and conduct a series of meetings at which fisheries scientists could identify strategies to resolve commercial fishing problems associated with biotoxins and pathogens. The goal is for NFI, which represents the commercial fishing industry, to develop a legislative initiative to implement these strategies. A preliminary workshop was held in Charleston, South Carolina, in March 1998. For more information, contact Tom Culliton, 301/713-3000, ext. 142.

For more information, contact:

Daniel J. Basta, Director
NOS Special Projects
National Ocean Service, NOAA
1305 East-West Highway, 9th Floor
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3281
301/713-3000

For product information, contact:

Pam Rubin, Managing Editor
301/713-3000, ext. 121

NOS.Specialprojects@noaa.gov

